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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan

Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General**

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 20 of General Assembly resolution 54/189 B of 17 December 1999, by which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-fifth session a report on actions taken pursuant to that resolution. The report covers developments during the period from 1 July 1999 until 30 June 2000.

II. Review of major humanitarian developments

2. The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan continued to deteriorate during the period under review. The combination of ongoing military conflict, seemingly intractable political difficulties and the harsh natural environment continued to take its toll on the lives and livelihoods of the majority of Afghans.

3. As predicted in the previous report on this question (A/54/297), fighting escalated in the summer of 1999, further compounding the vulnerability of millions of Afghan civilians. A major air and ground offensive launched by the Taliban against the United Front during August caused the displacement of over 100,000 people into the Panjshir Valley and Kabul. In some cases, the displacement was forced. In the Shomali Plains north of Kabul, widespread burning of houses and crops by the Taliban followed the displacement.

4. During the reporting period, combatants denied humanitarian agencies effective access to many areas, including parts of northern Kabul, Parwan and Kapisa provinces and districts in central Afghanistan. This compounded the difficulties in reaching affected populations, caused by inhospitable terrain and poor infrastructure. Earlier problems of access also had continuing effects during the period under review, for example, the recent winter/spring outbreak of measles in various parts of the country, which killed about 800 children, could be attributed to lack of immunization

* A/55/150 and Corr.1 and 2.

** The late submission of the report is owing to the recently changed situation in Afghanistan. The impact of recent conflict and new humanitarian needs is described in the report.

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owing to the inaccessibility of these areas in 1998 and 1999.

5. Nevertheless, the build-up of the United Nations international presence inside Afghanistan during 1999 and into 2000 greatly contributed to the ability of the United Nations to respond to humanitarian needs, in particular those of displaced persons. The United Nations now maintains a permanent international staff presence in Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, Faizabad and Jalalabad, and a transient presence at Hazarajat.

6. Increased international presence on the ground also put the United Nations in a better position to press the authorities for access to populations in need. In December 1999, the United Nations succeeded in negotiating cross-line access to displaced populations in the Panjshir Valley. This allowed for urgently needed food and shelter materials to reach 60,000 displaced people, helping them to survive the harsh winter months. A similar operation was conducted for internally displaced persons in Darra Souf in the Central Highlands. Despite these positive developments, the authorities continue to limit access to certain areas at great cost to civilians who are in desperate need of assistance.

7. The impact of the Taliban offensive during the summer of 1999 continues to be felt by large numbers of displaced people gathered in Kabul, the Panjshir Valley, and in various locations in the north and east of the country. Sporadic fighting has continued in the central and northern regions and is further complicating assistance efforts, as well as compounding the plight of many civilians.

8. An additional development of serious humanitarian concern is the drought affecting Afghanistan and the wider region, the worst since 1971. The whole country is affected, and long-term intervention will be required to alleviate the suffering of the most vulnerable populations.

9. The drought has diminished both crop and livestock production. The crop assessment by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) estimates cereal production in 2000 at 1.82 million metric tonnes, representing a reduction of 44 per cent relative to 1999 and 53 per cent relative to 1998. Reduced fodder availability, water shortages and distress sales have decreased animal holdings by between 50 per cent and 100 per cent across the country.

10. The drought presents a major dilemma for those considering voluntary repatriation from neighbouring countries. While repatriation slowed towards the end of 1999, it picked up in the first quarter of 2000 following agreement between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on a joint programme for the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees from that country. Humanitarian assistance to address the effects of the drought is as critical for those inside Afghanistan as it is for those returning.

III. Socio-economic developments

11. The severely war-disrupted economy shows a high incidence of poverty and unemployment. There are few formal-sector employment possibilities. The only functioning social safety net is charity in rural areas and international assistance in urban areas (particularly the WFP-subsidized bakeries). There are still no major rehabilitation or development projects or any major private sector investment.

12. Transit trade with neighbouring countries remains a key sector of the "legitimate" economy. Cross-border trade through the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkmenistan has expanded as Afghanistan adjusted to the suspension of flights and border restrictions with Pakistan. Trade in narcotics and, presumably, arms constitutes the mainstay of the "criminalized" economy.

13. The Taliban reorganization of the public sector has worsened urban poverty. Numbers of staff at several central ministries have been reduced, the Ministry of Higher Education by 6,000 employees and the Ministry of Education by 12,000. Female teachers who were no longer allowed to work but were still on the payroll have now lost their incomes as well. At the same time, public sector pay has been reorganized, with the announcement of a US$ 0.30 daily food allowance for all civil servants. While the redundancies have been implemented, the announced pay increases have not materialized and the precarious state of public finances has meant that politically weak ministries are in arrears in salary payments.

14. After relative stability in exchange rates in 1999, the Afghani depreciated more rapidly in 2000. The

economy remains open and prices rapidly adjust to exchange rate movements. Public sector workers with salaries fixed in Afghanis and rural workers with employment contracts that include a fixed cash element are, however, highly vulnerable to this instability.

15. The regional drought has emerged as the dominating factor affecting the socio-economic situation in the medium term. It comes at a time when much of the population is already highly vulnerable. Some, in particular in the Central Highlands, have had to sell their assets or go into debt to cope with reduced crop production in 1999. Moreover, in the centre and north of the country, people have faced conflict and displacement. The possibility of renewed fighting and the effects that war-induced displacement may have on drought-affected populations are cause for concern.

16. Lack of savings or assets and the high level of dependence on agriculture and livestock raising mean that many families have nothing to fall back on. There is no meaningful presence of government line ministries beyond a few provincial capitals. Government structures either do not exist or have no capacity to assist people, who find themselves with no prospect of a crop for the next 12 months. The migration of people from drought-affected areas to urban areas means that there are fewer and fewer job opportunities.

17. A mitigating factor against the drought is that neighbouring Pakistan, which has a better-developed irrigation network, has recorded a wheat surplus estimated at 2 million tonnes in 2000. Pakistan has provisionally designated 600,000 tonnes for export to Afghanistan.

18. The United Nations imposed limited economic sanctions on Afghanistan with effect from November 1999. Since then, there have been no commercial flights to Afghanistan. However, flights of the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and non-governmental organizations in support of the international assistance operation have continued, and Ariana Airlines was able to undertake flights to Saudi Arabia for the annual Hajj. So far, the majority of Afghans seems to have adapted to the limited sanctions with minimal economic effects. The psychological effects of sanctions linked, in the minds of many, to the deteriorating socio-economic situation have, however, profound ramifications, including the development of hostile attitudes towards the United Nations.

IV. Assistance provided by the United Nations and its partners

19. The ongoing political and military instability inside Afghanistan and the absence of practically all institutions of governance reinforce the requirement for structured and robust coordination. The Secretary-General's reform initiative and the strategic framework for Afghanistan, prescribing close integration of assistance, human rights and peacemaking activities, have contributed to a high level of coordination.

20. The concept of principled common programming provides the mechanism for translating the principles of the strategic framework into concrete assistance activities on the ground. During the past year, the establishment of United Nations regional coordinating offices and inter-agency regional coordinating bodies has served to strengthen the coherence of assistance programmes delivered inside Afghanistan. As these structures become more firmly established, collective planning and programming are expected to continue to improve. This in turn will enhance accountability.

A. Food aid and food security

21. Confronting its worst drought since 1971, Afghanistan is expected to have a cereal deficit during the period 2000/2001 as high as 2.3 million tonnes, more than double that of the previous year. Access to food is, therefore, a chronic problem that will be dramatically exacerbated over the coming year for a large proportion of the population of approximately 22 million. WFP plans to provide 117,166 tons of wheat to 1,603,000 victims of drought throughout the country for 12 months from 1 July 2000.

22. Key indicators of the gravity of the situation are increases in the price of wheat and changes in the relative purchasing power of Afghans. The price increase for a kilogram of wheat flour in Afghanis, between the first week of September 1999 and the last week of May 2000, varied from 40 per cent in Kabul to 119 per cent in Mazar. In areas of Hazarajat, where a food blockade persists, wheat is unavailable or costs four times the price in Kabul. Many families are

subsisting on famine foods and deaths by starvation have occurred.

23. The quantity of wheat flour that a daily wage labourer is able to purchase in one day is used as a basic indicator of purchasing power. Purchasing power in most major urban centres in Afghanistan early in 2000 had declined in comparison to the previous year, by between 4 per cent in Jalalabad and 40 per cent in Mazar.

24. Under its regular programme from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2001, WFP expects to provide 201,850 metric tonnes of food to 2.6 million vulnerable Afghans through the activities described below. It is intended that 52 per cent of recipients will be women or girls.

25. WFP supports bakery projects in Jalalabad, Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif. In Kabul, 132 general bakeries and 25 women's bakeries provide heavily subsidized bread for up to 270,000 vulnerable people daily. In Mazar-i-Sharif, 80 bakeries, 20 run by women, serve approximately 92,000 people daily. The Jalalabad project operated 60 bakeries between March and May, during the pre-harvest lean season, serving 112,000 people daily.

26. Emergency food distributions have been carried out in various regions. In southern Afghanistan, emergency food distribution in three provinces since January 2000 has reached an estimated 170,000 people. A similar distribution was carried out between December 1999 and March 2000 in three districts of Ghor province in western Afghanistan for an estimated 7,000 families. These interventions followed an emergency food needs assessment by WFP and had to be made primarily because of the poor wheat harvest during 1999 and 2000. Emergency food distributions also included support for displaced families. In December 1999 and in April 2000, as part of a United Nations-led operation, WFP provided wheat to 7,000 displaced families in the Panjshir Valley. In addition, in December, as part of a winter relief effort coordinated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, WFP assisted 2,000 families in Darra Souf in Samangan province. Emergency food assistance has also been provided for up to 16,000 internally displaced persons residing in the ex-Soviet compound at Kabul.

27. Food-for-work activities are currently being used to improve agricultural infrastructure and rural feeder roads. These activities increase food production and improve access to markets and health facilities. One of the largest food-for-work projects of WFP is the Kabul winter relief project, which began in March 2000 and will provide almost 2,000 metric tonnes of wheat for up to 4,000 men and 1,300 women.

28. Other activities currently being supported by WFP include food-for-seed, under which 879 metric tonnes of wheat have been distributed to 1,700 farmers, and institutional feeding, under which 1,659 metric tonnes of food have so far been distributed to 46,737 vulnerable beneficiaries.

B. Health

29. United Nations agencies are collaborating with non-governmental organizations and the public health authorities to relieve the deficit in health services in Afghanistan. Priorities include human resource development for health, expansion of the integrated disease control programme, and activities to improve maternal and child health. While health facilities remain inadequate and even non-existent in many remote areas, there has been modest improvement in the access of women to health care. Afghanistan continues, however, to have some of the worst health indicators in the world.

30. During 1999, over 100 training courses for both female and male health workers were conducted inside Afghanistan by experts from the World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), an international non-governmental organization and national health authorities. Workshops to revise the curricula for intermediate medical courses for nurse midwives, laboratory technicians, doctors' assistants and dental assistants are also being facilitated. The rehabilitation of a female nursing school at Kandahar allowed it to be restarted in May 2000 with the help of WFP and WHO. Similar support has been provided to the nursing school in Herat, where 50 per cent of the students are women. Male nursing schools are also being supported with equipment and materials.

31. WHO and UNICEF, in collaboration with national authorities and other partners, implemented four rounds of national immunization days for polio eradication for children under the age of five years. The success of this programme has demonstrated that

well-coordinated efforts can reach large groups of people despite the ongoing constraints in war-torn Afghanistan. The success of the national immunization days in May and June 2000 can be attributed to the respect of both sides for a ceasefire that had been negotiated under the leadership of UNICEF.

32. To reduce the spread of malaria and leishmaniasis, WHO and its partners have provided drugs, insecticide-treated nets, laboratory supplies and training courses in all regions and have developed a health education leaflet on malaria for schoolchildren in the local languages.

33. To support tuberculosis control, WHO has provided drugs, diagnostic facilities and shortcourse chemotherapy to 5,000 patients, has trained health staff in the WHO tuberculosis control policy and directly observed treatment shortcourse strategy, and has translated into Dari and printed training modules for managing tuberculosis at the district level. A national tuberculosis manual has also been developed.

34. The capacity to control and prevent the spread of epidemics in Afghanistan remains critical. In addition to the measles outbreak in winter and spring, acute haemorrhagic fever was reported from Gulran district in Herat in May and June 2000. WHO sent a four-member medical team to Herat to investigate.

35. UNICEF, WHO, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and concerned non-governmental organizations are promoting safe motherhood initiatives and mother and child health services, in cooperation with national authorities. The focus of UNFPA assistance remains largely on women, who suffer a high rate of maternal mortality. To strengthen existing health facilities, female physicians, nurses and midwives have been trained in safe motherhood. WHO has also facilitated the training of 36 trainers of traditional birth attendants and has trained 404 such attendants from five regions of the country, who now serve in more than 400 villages. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), through the Afghanistan Rural Rehabilitation Programme, also supports human resource development in the health sector. WHO, in collaboration with national authorities, has functionally rehabilitated eight referral hospitals (provincial and district) and 30 mother and child facilities, which are serving about 600,000 women and children in all regions.

C. Water and sanitation

36. Lack of safe drinking water, poor sanitation and unhygienic practices contribute to high mortality rates. A Water and Sanitation Sector Group for Afghanistan (WSG) was formed in March 2000 under the leadership of UNICEF, with WHO, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and non-governmental organizations. The main objective is to raise awareness of good hygiene. In addition, a hand-pumped water supply and sanitation manual was developed in two local languages.

37. UNICEF has been helping communities to reduce the incidence of water-borne diseases, especially diarrhoea, through the provision of hand pumps and wells, sanitation facilities and hygiene education in rural and peri-urban areas. A sanitation and hygiene centre was established in Kandahar to serve as a demonstration and training centre.

38. Under the Poverty, Eradication and Community Empowerment (PEACE) initiative, rehabilitation projects in water supply, drainage, solid waste collection and the environment were carried out in six major cities and 23 rural districts. These included the construction or improvement of 295 shallow wells, the construction of 106 tube wells, the construction of village/district water supply systems, the construction of 11,180 pit latrines, and the protection of springs and karez wells, in rural Afghanistan. In urban centres, the PEACE initiative, through the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, has dug 85 wells, installed 180 hand pumps and cleared 85,000 cubic metres of solid waste. A project to improve access to water in the drought-stricken areas of Kandahar and Herat is at present under way.

D. Education

39. The position of the Taliban on girls' education has not changed, and girls are still not allowed to attend formal government schools. Women are not allowed to work in formal schools. Consequently, education has lost a vital resource and, further, boys no longer see women as role models in schools. The assistance community has therefore continued to work mostly through alternative and non-discriminatory channels of education in various regions of the country.

40. Owing to the ban on girls' education in the formal sector, UNICEF and a variety of non-governmental organizations support home-based schools, reaching an estimated 300,000 children. Through the local authorities, UNICEF continued work with over 150 rural community-based schools in the eastern region, providing educational materials, funding, teacher training, and management and technical support. In addition, various non-governmental organizations support formal primary schools, mostly in rural areas where the authorities allow girls access to schools.

41. In Badakhshan province, which is controlled by the Northern Alliance and where both girls and boys have access to schools, UNICEF and an international non-governmental organization provide education materials and teacher training. To complement this, WFP has begun food-for-education activities in chronic food-deficit areas, providing wheat to students and teachers to stem the disastrous dropout rates in the primary school years. Girls also receive edible oil. The project supports 49 schools in Badakhshan and about 21,122 students, 591 teachers and 88 support staff.

42. Recognizing that the construction or rehabilitation of educational facilities is not enough to address the education problems in Afghanistan, the PEACE initiative, in close cooperation with other partners, has undertaken a variety of educational activities for both genders. In rural Afghanistan, these included training of teacher trainers, provision of textbooks to 10,000 students, provision of non-formal education to 4,400 out-of-school children, and provision to 792 persons of vocational training in different trades, such as carpentry and masonry. In urban Afghanistan, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, through 50 community forums, provides education and vocational training to approximately 8,000 boys and girls. In 1999, the PEACE initiative also established 44 community primary schools for boys and girls in areas where no schools of any kind existed.

43. Educational messages on health, education, safe water, sanitation, hygiene and mine awareness are disseminated by radio through the Afghan Education Drama radio project of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). UNICEF is further assisting with the training and evaluation components of the BBC Radio Education for Afghan Children (REACH) project.

44. UNESCO continues to provide technical support for education in Afghanistan. Together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) undertook the Education for All 2000 assessment of basic education in Afghanistan. UNESCO has also produced a resource package of eight booklets on the culture of peace.

E. Mine action

45. Afghanistan remains severely affected by landmines and unexploded ordnance. The United Nations coordinated Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan, with its workforce of some 4,800, undertakes various activities including mine-awareness education, technical training in mine action, general and technical information gathering, and survey and clearance of areas contaminated by mines and unexploded ordnance.

46. The current known area contaminated by landmines in Afghanistan is 715 square kilometres, spread throughout the country. Of this, 333 square kilometres are assessed as being vitally important residential areas, commercial land, roads, irrigation systems and primary production land. In areas contaminated by landmines, there is an equally significant and serious problem posed by the existence of unexploded ordnance.

47. The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan plans, manages and integrates its activities with the other sectoral programmes implemented by other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. Nine Afghan non-governmental organizations and four international non-governmental organizations implement the Programme's activities. In addition, one Iranian non-governmental organization is also involved in mine-awareness training for the refugees returning from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Field-level planning, coordination and quality control are carried out by the United Nations regional mine action centres located at Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and Jalalabad.

48. In 2000, the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan aims to clear up to 39.3 square kilometres of mined area and 63.5 square kilometres of former battle area, and to survey and mark 39.5 square kilometres of minefield and 63.5 square kilometres of

former battle area. It also plans to provide mine-awareness training to 1.5 million people and to provide the necessary staff training to maintain the Programme's standards and existing capacity.

F. Food and agriculture

49. While agricultural production remains the backbone of the economy, and the lifeline for the majority of Afghans, assistance activities remain constrained by the relative lack of funding provided by donors.

50. Despite this, FAO continued its activities to improve seed production and animal health and related activities in the sectors of animal production and support to horticultural development and pest management. The activities are a major component of the PEACE initiative and are part of the UNDP country programme.

51. The FAO Livestock Programme continued to support 255 district-based veterinary field units. Routine animal health activities continued in terms of vaccinations, deworming and other treatments as needed. Veterinary field units have developed a high degree of self-sustainability through a user-pays cost-recovery system.

52. To support animal production, efforts have focused on addressing the concerns raised by farmers at organized discussions in district shuras. Problems are solved with the assistance of FAO-supported local initiators, who address technical problems of both men and women farmers.

53. UNOPS, as part of the PEACE initiative, has continued to support the rehabilitation and construction of irrigation infrastructure as part of the overall effort to increase agricultural production. As a result of these interventions, 50,274 hectares of agricultural land have been brought into cultivation.

54. With assistance from FAO and WFP, 6,000 metric tonnes of wheat seed of improved high-yielding varieties have been produced in the current season. About one million fruit tree saplings have been planted in re-established orchards. Seventy district trainers are supervising 350 community trainers in providing advisory services to farmers.

55. Given the drought and the enormous cereal deficit, attention and funding may be drawn away from agricultural development efforts and directed towards emergency relief.

G. Rural and urban rehabilitation

56. The PEACE initiative organized by UNDP has facilitated the creation of community structures at the grass-roots level through two of its major components, the Afghanistan Rural Rehabilitation Programme, executed by UNOPS, and the Urban Rehabilitation Programme, executed by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. Committees formed under these programmes raise awareness of the rehabilitation and development process, and subsequently assist in the formation and management of community organizations. During 1999, 5 female and 57 male rural development committees were established, and 22 community structures were created.

57. In six cities, community forums identify needs and develop subprojects, mainly in the areas of health, education, training, income-generation, community infrastructure, water and sanitation, roads, irrigation, energy and reintegration of refugees. The forums have also played an active role in a number of relief projects. These include pasta-making and road improvement in Mazar, involving 1,200 women and 1,500 men, and carpet weaving in Bamyan for 1,500 vulnerable women.

58. During 1999, the PEACE initiative also provided direct and indirect services to 25,000 disabled and other marginalized people. The programme includes orthopaedic appliances, physiotherapy, job training, microcredit, home-based training, integrated education, and facilitating the formation of disabled people's committees.

59. Under the PEACE initiative, basic local infrastructure has been constructed or rehabilitated with the involvement of community development organizations. This includes 14,845 cubic metres of road structures (bridges, culverts etc.) and 239 canal crossings which facilitate marketing of agricultural products, access to alternative income sources, access to health facilities, and communications.

60. A programme on environmental impact assessment training, the first such programme in Afghanistan, was conducted for about 100 national professionals. Moreover, several training and

awareness-raising initiatives are under way to promote environmental protection.

61. The income-generation and rural and urban credit programme of the PEACE initiative caters mainly to families living below the poverty line and other vulnerable groups, such as families headed by widows and disabled persons. Establishment of village revolving funds, a culturally and religiously accepted arrangement, has ensured sustainability of rural credit. In urban areas, each community forum has established its own scheme for income-generation projects, through the provision of small-scale seed capital, either as credit or equity. The capacity of communities has been built in managing microcredit and 7,455 rural women have also been provided with credit or income-generating activities.

H. Voluntary repatriation

62. Afghan refugees, one of the largest refugee caseloads over the past 20 years, currently number 1.2 million in Pakistan and 1.4 million in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The majority of Afghan refugees, having considered the military and political insecurity in Afghanistan, the lack of economic opportunities and basic services and the severe drought, as well as reports of serious violations of human rights, are not inclined to return.

63. With diminished international assistance to refugees in the region and worsening economic conditions, host Governments are equally reluctant to continue their past generous hospitality to Afghans. These Governments are becoming increasingly impatient to find a durable solution for these large refugee groups, raising concerns about certain practices that have failed to meet internationally recognized standards of protection.

64. Despite the enormous difficulties, at least 100,000 Afghans continue to be repatriated voluntarily each year. In the first six months of 2000, 64,000 Afghans voluntarily returned home. For these returnees and the millions of others who returned previously, reintegration assistance is important for sustainable repatriation.

65. UNHCR provides emergency reintegration assistance to meet the most basic needs of repatriating refugees for three months after their return. Under a programme concluded with the Islamic Republic of Iran in February 2000, 34,730 refugees received transport assistance from the border to provincial capitals of districts of return, minimizing the risk of internal displacement along sensitive border locations. UNHCR, together with WFP, also assisted 4,991 returnee families from Pakistan with the reconstruction of their homes. With regard to education, 5,900 children in over 300 community schools received materials such as stationery, textbooks, and supplementary reading materials. School buildings were renovated, teachers trained, and incentives paid to teaching staff. Over 200 shallow wells were improved, lessening the impact of the severe drought in southern and western Afghanistan. Income-generation projects for 1,500 women returnees were initiated throughout the country.

66. Assistance targeted not only returnees but also communities receiving a high number of returnees. Several United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations collaborated with UNHCR, in particular under the Greater Azro Initiative, by providing multisectoral assistance for the sustainable reintegration of returnees and the establishment of livelihoods.

67. To monitor the situation of returnees from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, UNHCR has conducted extensive interviews with heads of returnee households, including women heads of families. The monitoring focuses primarily on respect for the rights of returnees, especially those provided for in the declarations of amnesty. These include non-discrimination on the grounds of religion, ethnicity and gender, access to and recovery of land and property, and exemption from conscription for at least one year after repatriation. In addition, the monitoring generates information on the access of returnees to potable water, health and education, as well as on the economic situation in the areas of return.

68. Based upon information collected through the monitoring exercise and in consultation with agencies working in various regions of Afghanistan, UNHCR has established a list of districts to which repatriation should not be facilitated either owing to insecurity (active hostilities) or the drought.

69. Although the current situation in Afghanistan does not allow UNHCR to promote voluntary repatriation, refugees who decide to return will continue to receive transport and repatriation grants.

UNHCR estimates that up to 200,000 Afghan refugees will return in 2000.

70. Diminishing international interest in the Afghan situation and reductions in donor support are, however, making it more difficult for UNHCR to ensure respect for the rights of Afghan refugees, returnees and asylum seekers. This includes guaranteeing the safe entry of new arrivals, providing immediate assistance and determining their status in coordination with host countries. Health, education and social services in the countries of asylum, as well as projects to support the successful reintegration of the returnees in Afghanistan, are also now at risk.

I. Drug control

71. In 1999, Afghanistan produced an estimated 4,600 metric tonnes of opium, 75 per cent of the world's illicit production. Most opium poppy growing districts are currently under the control of the Taliban. The abuse of opium, heroin, and pharmaceutical drugs continues to increase in the Afghan population, and some of the highest rates of heroin addiction in the world can now be found in the region. The United Nations International Drug Control Programme is undertaking a pilot project to address drug control and consumption in Afghanistan. Regional peace and stability are, however, the key to a sustained solution to drug control in Afghanistan.

72. Drug production and trafficking threaten regional stability and security. At the same time, the continuous war in Afghanistan and its effects on personal, national and regional levels of security provide an ideal environment for the cultivation and trafficking of drugs. With regard to drug trafficking, it is recognized that institutional support for law enforcement in Afghanistan is not practicable in the current political environment. The United Nations International Drug Control Programme encourages Afghan policies against illicit drugs through sustained dialogue with the Taliban, and with communities in which drugs are both used and produced in the Programme target areas. Owing to the Programme's continued advocacy for drug control, the leader of the Taliban movement and provincial governors issued decrees against opium poppy cultivation and subsequently destroyed opium poppy in the Programme's target areas. The Programme will continue to urge the Afghan factions to implement wider enforcement.

73. Pursuant to a decision by the "six plus two" group in February 2000 and a review of the issue by the Security Council in March 2000, a technical meeting on the Afghan narcotics issue and its wider regional implications was held at Vienna, from 8 to 10 May 2000. The participants ("six plus two" member States and major donor countries) discussed measures to enhance the effectiveness of drug control measures in Afghanistan and in the region. The United Nations common programming approach in Afghanistan was particularly emphasized as an appropriate framework to ensure that assistance is consistent with the goal of poppy elimination.

J. Human rights

74. The difficult human rights situation faced by Afghans is of major concern. A significant number of Afghans continue to die, and the vast majority are unable to enjoy their most fundamental human rights, owing to the accumulated effects of warfare, searing poverty, profound underdevelopment, and the policies and practices of the authorities.

75. Afghanistan has some of the most alarming socio-economic indicators in the world. Moreover, women and girls have few opportunities to participate in public life and in the decision-making that directly affects them. The drought that is now threatening the lives of a growing number of Afghans will exacerbate an already difficult human rights situation. Already there is evidence that the drought has resulted in famine deaths and is adversely affecting the rights to food, health and work.

76. Aid agencies can point to some achievements in addressing the problems of those who are least able to enjoy their human rights. Specific action has, for example, been taken to address the needs, including protection requirements, of the displaced and others who are affected by warfare. Various aid agencies are involved in assisting the disabled and in promoting the rights of women and children. A capacity-building programme to improve aid workers' understanding of human rights was launched earlier in 2000 after a survey that identified the issues of most concern to aid workers. This initiative will focus on the development of indigenous capabilities and will contribute to the development of tools to facilitate rights-based programming. Child-oriented agencies, including UNICEF and a number of non-governmental

organizations, have undertaken training on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Gender training workshops have been conducted for personnel of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations.

77. Both the gender and human rights advisors have developed mechanisms for consultation with colleagues from non-governmental organizations and the United Nations on policy and the mainstreaming of these respective agendas into programme activities. Human rights issues concerning health, education and women have been reviewed with the authorities as part of the Joint Consultative Committee process. At the programming level, in-depth meetings and questionnaires have identified and analysed the needs of the United Nations system in gender-related interventions. Pilot projects for women's employment have been designed. Steps have also been taken to develop an improved understanding of the human rights situation, commencing with the development of a profile on the right to health. Until, however, there is the commitment and capacity to tackle the underlying causes of poverty, including, in particular, the ongoing war, the human rights deficit faced by Afghans will continue to grow.

78. The immediate and direct effects of war are equal cause for concern. For the most part, non-combatants do not enjoy the rights and protection traditionally associated with civilian status. They have been bombed indiscriminately, deliberately targeted with violence and subjected to a wide range of human rights violations, including summary execution and arbitrary detention. Repeatedly, civilians have had to flee their homes, have seen their assets destroyed and have been denied access to humanitarian assistance.

79. There are indications that violations of human rights are carried out systematically. For example, sources allege that the Taliban in Samangan province massacred prisoners in May 2000, although confirmation of these allegations requires further investigation. During fighting in Darra Souf and Sangcharak districts, ongoing since January 2000, there have been repeated reports of arbitrary arrests and summary executions of civilians. The latter included the killing of village elders in and around Gosfandi. The climate of impunity that prevails in Afghanistan needs to be addressed; the absence of accountability is a significant factor in the persistence of human rights violations including the flagrant disregard of the right to life.

V. Assistance provided by Member States

80. Although the overall response to the consolidated appeal for 1999 was an improvement on previous years, it was still disappointing. A little over 60 per cent of the priority programmes identified in the appeal were not funded. Consequently, many opportunities to improve lives and livelihoods in Afghanistan have been missed.

81. This point has been considered by the members of the Afghan Support Group of donor countries, and there are positive signs from the response to the appeal for 2000 that additional resources will be available for humanitarian action in Afghanistan. Forty-three per cent of the total funding needs for 2000 have been covered as at July 2000, as against 22 per cent at the same point in 1999. Moreover, Member States are making their contributions to the appeal earlier, enabling timelier implementation of programmes and projects. As noted above, however, the drought is compounding humanitarian needs and increasing the requirement for international support. Additional information on funding, including contributions by specific donors, can be found on the web site <*www.reliefweb.com*>.

VI. Concluding observations

82. The past 12 months have brought no respite to Afghans, and the prospects for the next 12 months equally are bleak. There is no peace in sight. As both sides have reinforced their military capability with supplies from outside Afghanistan, an upsurge in military activity seems inevitable. Socio-economic conditions are deteriorating to a point that is difficult to imagine. With the exception of limited trade-related activity, most Afghans eke out an existence at subsistence levels or lower. In the cities, there is little or no employment. In drought-affected rural areas close to the front lines, some families are barely surviving on famine foods such as grasses, roots and alfalfa. Deaths from famine have been reported. The safety net provided by the international community's humanitarian assistance, while welcome, is threadbare; too many vulnerable Afghans fall through the net.

83. The combination of war, drought and displacement is likely to take a terrible toll in the

coming months. Afghans are renowned for their resilience but there are now signs that 22 years of war and the attendant development and human rights deficits are driving out the last vestiges of hope. The brain drain and the collapse of the education system will have a devastating effect on future generations and on development prospects.

84. Moreover, most Afghans feel very strongly that the international community has forgotten them, and failed them. Apart from much-needed life-saving humanitarian assistance which simply prevents Afghanistan from becoming an even greater disaster, there are few instances of response to the huge rehabilitation and reconstruction needs, even in those areas of the country that are relatively stable.

85. The humanitarian imperative to assist Afghans remains acute and indeed may become more so in the coming months. It is hoped that with support from Member States, the United Nations will increase its presence in the country and ensure that vital humanitarian assistance can continue.

86. The effects of the drought are expected to become more severe as the present year progresses. As the effects of the drought and the expected seasonal clashes accumulate, significant population movements cannot be ruled out, including across international borders. This could lead to an additional dimension of risk in a fragile and volatile region. On the positive side, the response of the donor community to the appeal launched for the drought has so far been encouraging. Depending on whether the drought eases or deepens in the coming months, the United Nations may need to appeal again to the international community.